

THE BEAUTY OF STRENGTH

HENRY HOWARD

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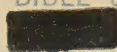
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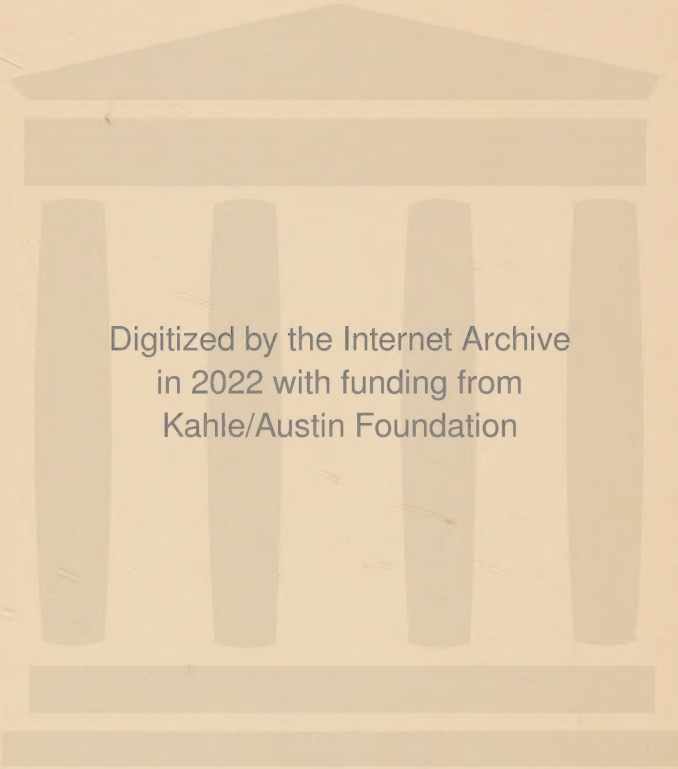
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THE BEAUTY OF STRENGTH

REV. HENRY HOWARD



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THE BEAUTY OF STRENGTH

*Sermons for Boys and Girls from
a letter by St. Paul*

BY

REV. HENRY HOWARD

Author of "The Threshold," "The Peril of Power," etc.

MINISTER OF THE FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH, NEW YORK CITY

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INTRODUCTION

These junior sermons mark a distinct advance in the development of preaching to the boys and girls of the church. In the first place, they are distinctly expository. The author has attempted to bring to his young congregation the real meaning of the passage of scripture, and is not satisfied by merely telling an interesting and instructive story.

A second feature is the continuity of the sermons. The entire volume is based on nine verses from the sixth chapter of Ephesians. They are in the order in which Dr. Howard used them in the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, beginning each week where he left off the week before. His success with this type of preaching would justify other ministers in their attempt to make the children's minutes in the church service a period of real Bible instruction.

W. H. L.

Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance.

Ephesians VI: 10-18.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	<i>Be Strong</i>	13
II	<i>The Beauty of Strength</i>	21
III	<i>Power to Stand</i>	31
IV	<i>Cleaving Power</i>	41
V	<i>Controlling Power</i>	51
VI	<i>The Secret of Strength</i>	61
VII	<i>The Uses of Temptation</i>	71
VIII	<i>The Girdle</i>	87
IX	<i>The Breast Plate</i>	99
X	<i>The Sandals</i>	107
XI	<i>The Shield</i>	119
XII	<i>The Helmet</i>	127
XIII	<i>The Sword</i>	135
XIV	<i>Praying</i>	143
XV	<i>Watching</i>	153

I

Be Strong

THE BEAUTY OF STRENGTH

I

Be Strong

This is a letter from prison, written by the Apostle Paul. He was in prison for doing what was right. You know, people used to be sent to prison because they were good. How thankful you ought to be that those times have passed. If they hadn't, why, you would all be in prison now—perhaps! Anyhow, Paul had done no harm. He was put in jail for doing his duty. It was not the first time, either. He had been in several jails, once or twice in Jerusalem, and then at Cæsarea, then again in Philippi, before this imprisonment at Rome. He must have got quite used to it by this time, and was now in for a two years' term in Rome. Well, it was while he was a prisoner in Rome that he wrote this letter to the Ephesians. He was

14 The Beauty of Strength

very fond of them, for he had spent three years with them; and you will see in the twentieth chapter of the Acts how very fond they were of him, and how broken-hearted they all were when they had to say good-bye. Paul never forgot the kindnesses that were shown him by the people to whom he had preached. He thought of them and prayed for them night and day, and although writing letters was not nearly so easy a thing as it is to-day, and sending them was harder still, he managed to send these beautiful letters along to help and comfort the friends that he loved.

Now, you would expect a letter written in jail by a prisoner to his friends to be very sad. I have seen letters written by prisoners and they have been full of longing to get out. Sometimes they have had complaints in them about the food, or the treatment, but very seldom, because every letter before it comes away is carefully read by one of the officers, who draws his pen through everything he thinks ought not to be written, and blots it out. Still, even when all the blotting out has been done, there is always a tone of sadness and discontent about a jail letter that makes it anything but cheerful

reading to the prisoner's friends. But if you read Paul's jail letters, you will not find a single word of complaint. He never asks for sympathy. He never whimpers or whines. In this very chapter he asks the Ephesians to pray for him. But what for? That he may get out soon or have nicer food and more of it? Oh, no; nothing like that. But that he may be brave-hearted and not afraid to speak for Jesus boldly when he gets the chance. He is so anxious about other people's happiness that he never thinks about his own. His joy is so full that it runs over and flows out like a river of comfort to gladden the hearts not only of those who lived hundreds of miles away, but also of us who are distant from him many hundreds of years. Fancy jail-letters carrying comfort to millions of people for nearly two thousand years! Why, that is the last thing that you would expect. You would just as soon think of going into a sickroom to be cheered up if you were down in the dumps, as to get brightened by a letter from a friend in jail.

And yet, what do you think? I know a dear girl who for years and years has been lying on her back perfectly helpless, and often in

16 The Beauty of Strength

great pain. Yet her room is the brightest and jolliest in the whole house. She supplies the sunshine and good temper for all the family, and a good many others besides. Whenever any of her friends get "humpty doo," as they call it, they have only to go into her room, and they are cured. It is like stepping into a garden on a bright spring morning when the dew is sparkling and the air is filled with the fragrance of flowers and the music of singing birds. Care cannot live in that room. There is a light on that pale, patient face that does not come from the sun that you and I can see. But it is a light before which sorrow spreads its wings and flies away, complaining grows dumb, and sighing is turned into song. And the reason of it all, is just this: Jesus is there, and wherever He is, it is heaven. So it was with Paul. Wherever he went, he took Jesus with him, and that made all the difference. You see, he had not done wrong, and a clear conscience and a clean heart will turn the darkest dungeon into a drawing-room. But the most beautiful palace becomes a stifling prison when conscience has been wronged and the heart is sick with sin. Paul had gone to prison for Christ's

sake, and so Christ went to prison for Paul's sake, putting peace in his mind and joy in his heart and songs on his lips.

But I must not forget to tell you that Paul was never left by himself, either when he was in the prison or while he was taking his exercise. Always, night and day, sleeping and waking, he was chained by the wrist to a Roman guard. Every three hours the guard was relieved, and another took his place.

Now, I think it was seeing these guards every day, as well as others, who would be standing sentry at their different posts, that made Paul think and speak so much about strength and armour. You must remember that these Roman soldiers were splendidly made men. They were pretty well all muscle. They could box and fence and wrestle and run. When they were off duty they spent most of their time in the gymnasium, so that they were always fit and in form.

Now, Paul would often get talking to these men, and get them to talk to him about the countries they had seen, and the battles they had fought. When you get him in the mood, which however is not often, a soldier will thrill

18 The Beauty of Strength

you with stories about the wars through which he has passed. Men who have been through the Great War have wonderful experiences to relate, and I have listened all night to tales of hair-breadth escapes amid hissing bullets and screaming shells. And so Paul would get quite interested as his different guards would tell him how with the sword they had smitten down this foe and that, or turned the weapons of others with their trusty shields, or, it may be, received this scar or lost that finger through unwatchfulness or want of skill. And there were the very swords that had done the deeds, and the very shields battered and dented with the shocks of war. What wonder that Paul thought of other battles that had to be waged, of right against wrong, of truth against falsehood, of light against darkness, and then of that other armour and that other sword with which alone those battles could be fought! How he turned his Roman guards, with their helmets and boots, their swords and shields, into texts for sermons to his Ephesian friends, you will see as you read.

II

The Beauty of Strength

II

The Beauty of Strength

"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

EPHESIANS VI. 10

Be Strong! Why, that's what every boy wants. I do not know much about girls, but, from what I do know, it would seem that they mostly want to be beautiful, rather than strong. Of course, there is a sort of strength in beauty, but it is not the kind that can lift heavy weights, and go long journeys without feeling tired. Beauty generally gets other people to do these things for it. Indeed, it is just wonderful how much a boy will do for a pretty girl, even if she is not his sister, and just because she is pretty!

But it is not about the strength of beauty that I want to speak. It is about the beauty of strength. Some other day we may have a talk about the other thing, and then as girls are

very fond of recipes, I will try and give you one for making the very plainest face beautiful, with a beauty that no age can wither, and no power destroy.

Every boy then longs to be strong. He looks forward impatiently to the time when he will be as strong as his father so as to cut all the wood for his mother, and carry all the parcels for his sister. If there is one thing more than another that grieves a boy, it is to see his sister carrying her own parcels, or, when his father is away from home to hear his mother chopping wood. It is lovely to be strong, to be able to climb high mountains, and swim broad rivers, and take long walks without knowing what it is to feel tired. But it is a wretched thing to feel weak, and to see other fellows doing things that you can't do. Sometimes a boy of this kind comes down to the football ground, looking very pale and thin. He walks about very slowly watching the fellows practise. His eye brightens, and his breath comes fast with excitement, as he watches the rough and tumble of the game, in which he is too shaky to take part. Now and then some big strong fellow, who "makes a mark," gives him the ball and

lets him have a kick. He feels half ashamed of the weakness which makes the fellows so kind to him, but he takes the kick all right, and smiles back his thanks. All the same though, he wishes he were strong enough to earn his own kicks, instead of getting them on the cheap.

If you have ever been sick, you will perhaps remember what a delicious thing it was to feel yourself getting stronger every day. Have you ever had the measles? I have. I was always reckoned a very slow boy at our school, but I was fast enough to catch the measles. The doctor came and said that I must stay in bed, and that the room must be kept dark, and a great many other things that I forget, but I do remember that I had a very good time. I got things to eat and drink during measles that I never got any other time, and then, best of all, there were no lessons to learn, no exercises to do, and no maps to draw; so that I felt inclined to say "good old measles!" But one day came, when the doctor pulled up the blind, and after he had looked at me, I heard him say, "He may get up to-day." Wasn't I glad! I heard him and mother going downstairs, so I thought I

24 The Beauty of Strength

would get up straight away, and put on my things.

Nothing could be easier, so slipping out of bed I made for the middle of the room, when the funniest thing happened that you ever knew. Everything in the room commenced to run rings round me, they all seemed so glad to see me better, and able to get up. The washstand chased the dressing-table, and the dressing-table ran after the chest of drawers, and even the solemn looking old bed, which was always as steady as a rock, frisked round like a kitten after a string. Just when I was in the middle of enjoying all the fun, the ceiling seemed to fall with a crash, and the floor jumped up with a bang, everything got suddenly dark, and the show was over! The next thing that I knew was lying in the bed, which had settled down again to its old quiet ways. Then they told me that I had fainted through weakness, and that all this had happened because I was not strong enough to get out of bed myself.

Very soon they fixed me up, and carried me downstairs. They sat me out in the sunshine, where I could see the fowls in the back yard, and hear the birds singing in the trees. Then,

by and by, they sent me away into the country to stay at a farm, and it was just lovely always to have one's pockets full of apples, to fish for eels and blackfish in the creek, to tumble about among the new-mown hay, to have bread and cream and honey a dozen times a day, and best of all, to feel oneself growing stronger almost every hour. Who wouldn't be strong!

But what is the use of telling people to be strong as though they could if they liked? Nobody would be weak if they could help it, and it seems a cruel thing to talk about strength to a weak man, and to fill him up with discontent. What would you think of anyone who would go to a hospital and walk up and down between the rows of white beds and pale faces saying, "Now then, be strong! Look at me how strong I am, what are you lying in bed for? Get up and jump round!" I don't know how you would feel but I would like to punch a fellow's head who talked like that. And what would the patients feel? Why it would hurt them almost as much as did the doctor's knife.

It is always a cruel thing to taunt people with their weaknesses. No true gentleman or lady ever does. If a gentleman happened to meet a

26 The Beauty of Strength

cripple in the street, he would not seem to see his crutches or in any way hurt his feelings for the world, by appearing to notice his lameness. Although all the time he is just aching with sympathy for him, he smiles cheerfully as though nothing was the matter, and puts him perfectly at his ease. As to reminding him of his trouble or mocking him by rallying words to be strong and fling away his crutches, he would rather die than be so mean. Now Paul, who wrote the words of our text, was a gentleman, and if the people to whom he wrote had been weak in body, he never would have written in the way he did. But this was not their trouble. They were a very hearty lot of folk—a strong, busy, hard-working and money-making people. They were rich and powerful in many ways. They had a lovely city on the seashore. Ships were always coming and going to and from their harbour, heavily laden with beautiful silks of all colors, stacks of sweets of every kind—figs and dates, almonds and raisins—dainties and wines. If you could only have seen them when this letter was being written, buying and selling in their bazaars, jostling one another in their markets, gossiping in the streets, or play-

ing in the games, you would have thought that they were going quite strong enough for anything and that there was no need for Paul to urge them to be strong.

But it was just because Paul had been living with them for so long and because he had mixed up with the crowd and knew them all perhaps better than they knew themselves; because he knew that they fancied themselves with all their money and their power, and although strong in body and in brain they had not strength to say "No" when a temptation had to be faced, or "Yes" when a duty had to be done, that he told them to "Be strong."

This is the kind of strength that we all need, and unlike the physical power of which we have been speaking, it can be had for the asking. It may be no fault of yours if you are weak in body, you may not always be able to help that, though sometimes of course it may be brought about by your own practice or neglect, but you can always help being too weak to say "Yes" to what is right and "No" to what is wrong.

Now, if you will look at the text again you will see that there are three words here which mean pretty much the same thing: "Strong,"

28 The Beauty of Strength

“Power,” “Might.” If I said of a man that he was “strong,” and then that he was “powerful,” and then again that he was “mighty,” you would very likely say, “Well, you have said the same thing about that man three times, although each time you have used a different word.” That is true about these three English words, but this letter was not written in English, but in Greek. Behind these three English words that mean nearly the same thing there are three Greek words that mean very different things. There are really three kinds of power spoken of in this verse, Power to stand, Power to cut your way through difficulty and Power to hold your power under fine control. It is about these that I want to speak to you, because I want you to build up an all-round manhood and womanhood that will enable you to stand in the evil day, and having done all, “to stand.” Every boy has his own temptation, and so has every girl. If you are going to get it under your feet instead of letting it get you underneath its, you must know what it means to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

III

Power to Stand

III

Power to Stand

First of all then you want the power to "stand." You have seen the great cliffs on the sea-coast, that lift themselves up so grandly for hundreds of feet above the shore, and look out so fearlessly across the waves, as if scorning their power, and challenging them to do their worst. Let us suppose that some afternoon the wind and the sea get talking together, and that, like some people we know, instead of speaking kindly of others, they talk against them, behind their backs.

Presently the wind says, "Have you ever noticed the bold look on that cliff? It does not seem to care for anything! It has been staring out here for I don't know how many thousand years, as much as to say:— 'Well, here I am, and here I am going to stay till all the foundations of the earth give way.'"

"Oh, yes," says the sea, "I know all about it. I'm iust sick and tired of its stubborn,

32 The Beauty of Strength

solid look. And then it is so proud, too! If there is one thing I hate in this world more than another, it is pride."

"You are quite right there," says the wind, "and if you will just listen a moment, I have a suggestion to make." So the sea curls its ear round to catch what the wind has to say, for, I am sorry to tell you, the sea always listens to the wind, and does whatever it says; and, as the wind is always changing its mind, the sea and those who use it, never know what is going to happen next.

"Now, if you are listening," says the wind, and it died down to a whisper, "if you like, we will work together to-night, and put an end to the cliff. I will come along just after dark, and we will give the whole night to the job. Then, in the morning, we will see whose turn it is to look proud."

Of course the sea was just delighted, and found it almost impossible to keep calm with such a secret locked up in her breast. However, she waited till the sun went down, and kept herself all ready for the wind. By and by he came, and the great waves, like giant horses, arched their necks at his coming, and lent them-

selves to his might, and all night long he drove them with thundering crash against the poor old cliff. But what did the cliff do? Why! he never moved. He just stood there smiling, and did not even trouble so much as to wipe his face. By and by, when the sun rose, there he stood, majestic as ever, "his brave brows brightening through the grey, wet air." But where were his enemies? Why the waves were smashed into millions of atoms, and churned up into foam, and you might have seen and heard them hissing and squirming like a lot of broken-backed serpents at his feet; while, as for the wind, it was a hundred miles away, snorting with disappointment, and taking its revenge by blowing the hats off little boys' heads, and turning old ladies' umbrellas inside out.

But what was the secret of the cliff's victory? Just this, he knew how to stand. His feet reached deeply down into the living rock, and he could fearlessly lift up his forehead to the sky. This, then, is the first kind of power you need. Temptation will come up against you, sometimes like a mighty flood, and your feet must be firmly fixed on the "Rock of Ages,"

34 The Beauty of Strength

if you are to withstand its shock and hurl it back broken and destroyed.

It is a dreadful feeling to have no foothold. Sometimes at places where there is a very strong undertow, as it is called, bathers find it very difficult to get back to shore. They try to stand, but the outrunning current sucks away their feet, and drags on to their legs, so that they have to fight for bare life, digging their toes into the shifting sand, or else be swept clear out to sea.

But when Paul said, "Be strong," and then went on to speak about "standing," he was thinking of a wrestling match. If you look at the chapter from which the text is taken, you will see that he goes on to speak in the next verse but one about wrestling. This was a thing that he had seen a great deal of. He must have been very fond of watching the games when a boy, because he so often speaks of them in his letters. The Greeks and Romans of his time were great wrestlers, and would train for ten months of the year before a match. They became very strong, and their muscles stood out all over their bodies in rolls and ridges. If you go into almost any sculpture gallery you will

see statues in marble of the Greek and Roman athletes. There is one splendid piece called "The Wrestlers," which you ought to see the next time you go. Now, the great thing in wrestling is to keep on your feet. I have seen two prize wrestlers struggling with each other, and their feet seemed glued to the floor. They seemed to grip the boards with their toes. This requires very great strength; but it also requires knowledge. There is a trick in it that it is not my business to explain in a talk like this, but a wrestler must know it, and do it, to win. You should see how two wrestlers watch one another, lest either should gain the advantage, and trip the other up.

Now, Paul says, "Be strong," because "we wrestle." Every boy, and every girl too, has been entered for a wrestling match. There is no escape. Everyone must come into close grip with the enemy, and either throw or be thrown. This is why Paul keeps on saying "stand" so many times within so short a space. He uses the word four times in three verses. It is the one important thing which, if we forget all else, we must remember.

But he goes on to tell us that there is one

36 The Beauty of Strength

great disadvantage which we suffer in this struggle, and that is, that while our enemy can see us, we cannot see him. We have to wrestle with an unseen foe. Why, it generally takes a boy all his time to win a fight, even when he can see the other fellow. But just fancy having to fight someone that you can neither see nor feel. What chance would you have? and how would you know how the thing was going, and whether you were getting the best or worst of it?

I remember a fight that I had when about twelve years old. I did not "owe it" to the other fellow, and he had nothing against me that I knew of. But then, there hadn't been a fight at the school for a long time, and that was felt to be a bit of a disgrace. So some of the bigger boys arranged that two of us should perform for the honor of the school. We agreed, and on the following afternoon we gathered on a green. The two of us which were selected slipped off our coats and vests, that we might the more easily punch one another for the sake, as we foolishly thought, of the school's good name. All the fellows stood round us in a ring, and told us to "go to it." After a time we just

followed one another watchfully round and round with a gentle sparring movement, and at a quite safe distance. This, however, did not satisfy the ring. It wasn't what they had come for. They wanted to see some "fun," as they called it, and closing in upon us, they forced us to close in upon each other. Presently, I got a surprise, and upon recovering from it, my left eye, which was in good working order a moment before, seemed too big for its socket. While I was thinking about this my nose suddenly required attention; and altogether, what with a singing in my ears, and a sort of "tired feeling" all over, it seemed time to go home and feed the fowls.

Just then, however, I saw with a thrill that the other fellow began to look damaged, and his nose began to bleed, and his lip began to swell and quiver. The sight of this filled me with a strange joy. I forgot my own troubles, and, romping in, I won that fight in the next round.

Now, that all this was very wicked, I need not remind you. I only tell it to you that you may see what an advantage a boy has in fighting when he can see his foe. I was just giving in,

38 The Beauty of Strength

because I was getting the worst of it, when really I was on the road to victory.

And so it has often happened, in our struggle against sin. If we had only held out a little longer, instead of losing heart, we should have taken a clean fall out of our adversary, and got him under our feet.

IV

Cleaving Power

IV

Cleaving Power

We have spoken about the power of "stand"; we are now going to discuss the subject of "cleaving power," or the "power to cut your way through difficulty."

Perhaps some of you thought that there was not much in just being able to stand. But, after all, it is the man who shows himself able to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand," that will surprise you by the power to cut and cleave that he has thus made his own. Years ago there were anchored in the beautiful harbor of Samoa quite a number of German warships, and other vessels together with an English man-of-war, the "Calliope," commanded by Captain Kane. Suddenly there were signs of a coming storm. So fiercely did the wind blow that the only safety for the ships was to get out of the harbor, and make for the open sea. This they tried to do, but before the German vessels could get under way, they were

42 The Beauty of Strength

flung high and dry upon the shore, where they cracked like walnuts on the rocks. But the grand old "Calliope" stood out with her nose in the very teeth of the gale. It blew so hard that, although her engines were working at full speed ahead, she never made a single inch for a solid hour. She just stood still against the awful tempest, measuring all her splendid strength against the force of the hurricane, with her pistons plunging, and her screw whirring and all her pulses throbbing as if her heart would break with the strain. For a full hour she kept this up, without moving an inch forward, but she never moved back! She just stood. Then, gradually, she forged ahead just a shade, then a little more, till by and by she steamed victoriously out till even the doomed and drifting Germans could not keep back a cheer.

Now, it was because the "Calliope" was able to "stand" through the black blast of that awful hour, that she saved herself and all on board. There will come times in your lives when you will be able to do nothing more than simply stand against the forces of evil. But to stand in such a case will mean what it meant in the case of the "Calliope." You will be able

to forge ahead and not only save yourselves, but others too. Now, it is this power to forge ahead that we have to deal with to-day. You have often seen a football match. Of course, it is a fine thing to be able to stand in football. Sometimes you will see a player cleverly take the ball, and make a run for goal. Just then one of the other side comes tearing across the field with all his might to upset him and get the kick. But the holder of the ball sees him coming, and just at the right moment gathers himself together, digs his heels into the ground, ducks his head, stiffens his shoulder, and just stands. The next thing you see is the other fellow bouncing off him like a tennis ball, and tucking himself up on the ground as if he were trying to sit on his head some twenty feet away.

But, then, no football match was ever won by fellows who only knew how to stand. A player needs the power to cut his way through all difficulties, and plant the ball between the posts. And so, in the great battle of life, we need power, not only to stand, but to cleave, and cut, and thrust our way through every foe.

You have heard of dynamite. It is one of the most powerful explosives known. It can

44 The Beauty of Strength

burst and blast its way through anything. Ordinary gunpowder is very powerful, but it is only a baby compared to dynamite. If you were to put a pound of gunpowder on the top of a rock and fire it, it would only puff off in smoke, and leave the rock unhurt. But if you put a very much smaller quantity of dynamite there, and let it off, it would go down through the rock and shatter it into atoms. It is not afraid of difficulty or resistance. It rather likes it. Gunpowder chooses the easiest direction in which to explode. Dynamite goes every way at once.

Now, this word "dynamite" is not English, but Greek. It means "power." It is one of the words for power used by Paul in our text. "Dynamite" is what Christ promised to His disciples before He left them. He knew all the resistance they would meet, the enemies that would attack them, and all the forces of evil with which they would have to struggle, and so He said to them, in Acts i.8: "Ye shall receive power (dynamite), after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." That meant victory for them all along the line.

If you have ever been down a mine you will

have seen the awful difficulties that the miners have to conquer that they may get the gold. Sometimes they are up against a solid face of rock, as hard as iron, and they must get through. You would wonder how they could ever manage it. But if you asked them, they would only smile, and say "Dynamite!" That is the magic power that can rend and tear its way through granite gates that try in vain to guard the yellow metal from the hand of man. You remember the story of Ali Baba and the forty thieves in the 'Arabian Nights,' and how, when he whispered "Open Sesame," the door suddenly flew back, and all its wonderful wealth was at his hand. Now dynamite is the "open sesame" that flings back all the great doors which guard the gold, and silver, and precious stones that fill the treasure caves of earth. It does not matter even if it is a mountain that has to be removed, it is all the same to dynamite as if it were a doll's house.

Very often, in preparing the track for a railway, and making it straight, mountains have to be pierced and cut in two. But this is as easy to dynamite as falling off a bike is to you. When the workman has plenty of dynamite,

46 The Beauty of Strength

he does not care how many difficulties lie in his way. The more the merrier. He is confident of success, because he is certain of his power.

Now, this is the second kind of power we all need. The power to "prepare the way of the Lord, and to make His paths straight." The prophet tells us that "every mountain and hill shall be laid low, that the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth." All this means that there are difficulties to be overcome and enemies to be conquered, and to do this we are in need of power. We want power, not only to stand, but to cut our way through all opposition, and put to flight the foes of God which, of course, are our foes too. Intemperance, gambling, and all the black host which, under their captain, the Prince of Darkness, are fighting against the Kingdom of God.

There is simply no end to the power we may have just for the asking, to fight the battles of God. The more we ask the better will God be pleased. But, remember, it must be used, we cannot keep it stored. If you don't use it, you'll lose it. It must be spent to be kept. This sounds wrong; but it is right just the same. Of

course, if you have a dollar and spend it you have not got it, but if you have power for the service of God and spend it, you increase it. Suppose now, you take your dollar to a shop and ask for a dollar's worth of chocolate creams, and when you put your money down you get a pound of chocolates and two dollars in change! "My word," you say, "that is a store I would like to deal at." Well, that is the sort of store that God keeps. If you go on spending the power He gives you in working for Him, He will keep on doubling it. But if you do not use it up He will take it away. The only way to make it last is by using it up as fast as you can in battling for the truth. God wants soldiers. Now, when a country wants soldiers, it offers them all they want to eat, and drink, and wear, as well as giving them a place to live in, but it cannot offer them strength. They must come supplied with that, and without it they are of no use to their country. That is why those in authority always pick the strongest men, and reject the weak ones. Now, our Captain never rejects recruits because they are not strong. Christ invites the weak; indeed, sometimes He prefers them, and uses them to con-

48 The Beauty of Strength

found the mighty because they trust more fully in His power, instead of relying on their own. All we have to do is to come just as we are in all our weakness, and He supplies the power to conquer the demon within and the foes without. Isaiah tells us that "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength." It does not matter then in the least how weak you feel you are, Christ will enrol you, and make you wise to know, and strong to do His will. He has a wonderful way of coming into lives, and doing things through them that they could not have done by themselves. But that this may happen, we must lay our lives open to Jesus Christ. He will not come in uninvited, but waits at the door of every life. If you will but open He will enter, and make you strong in His might. When He tells you to be strong, He means to make you strong, for a command of His becomes a promise when we make up our minds to obey.

V

Controlling Power

V

Controlling Power

Text: "Be strong in the Lord," etc.

EPHESIANS vi. 10

But there is a third kind of power which you need, and which is quite as important as either of the two we have already named. You have seen that you need power to "stand," and power to "cleave"; but power to cleave may do more harm than good, if not rightly guided and controlled. Power is a very dangerous thing unless properly managed. It is not enough for us to have great force. The important thing is how we are using it. It makes all the difference whether a keg of dynamite is in the hands of a wise man or a fool.

If you were going to let off a gun, the most important thing would be the direction in which it was pointed. Suppose you were not sure as to which end it would go off, whether at the breech or at the muzzle; how would you like to handle it? It would be no use telling you not

51

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52 The Beauty of Strength

to be afraid because the charge in the gun was a very powerful one. You would say at once that the very powerfulness of the charge was what made you afraid, and unless you were quite sure of the direction in which it would explode, you would rather leave it alone. The direction, then, in which power is used, is the most important thing. There are some men who have every power but the power rightly to direct and control their power. Such men work more mischief than good. Of course, power, as you have been already told, must be used; but it must not be spilt about and wasted. The greatest care must be taken against spending it for nothing. This is the mistake that a lot of people make. They are always busy; but then they are busy about the wrong thing, or at the wrong time, or else in the wrong way. They have any amount of power, but it is not rightly used. I saw a horse the other day, and he had any amount of power to pull a buggy-load of people, but he was putting it all into his hind legs and using it up in kicking out the dash-board, and smashing up things generally. The horse-power was there all right, but it was not under control, and was going to

waste, through being delivered at the wrong end. But it was not only wasteful, it was dangerous.

Power is always a dangerous thing unless under proper direction. What is it that makes men settle themselves so comfortably in a railway carriage, and read their papers, or tuck themselves round with rugs, and go to sleep with such a feeling of safety. Certainly not the thought of the tremendous power of the engine on in front; but the thought that all that power is so carefully and cleverly managed by the driver, who holds his hand on the lever that the whole train can be brought up standing in less than its own length. Let someone tell a carriageful of dozing travellers when the engine is plunging forward at the rate of sixty miles an hour that there is neither a driver nor a fireman on the footplate, and that the engine is going entirely on its own, and there will be no more dozing. In the place of comfort there will be at once the wildest and whitest terror, and desperate leaps for life from every door. So you see that something more than going power is needed; slowing power is wanted too. It really is better to have no power at all than

54 The Beauty of Strength

not to have it well in hand. If I were to ask you to name the most important thing in a watch, you would most likely say the mainspring; but this would be quite a mistake. It is perfectly true that the mainspring supplies the working power of the watch, but that power has to be kept in check if it is to tick off the seconds correctly and measure the minutes and hours.

Now the little thing that does this is called the "balance-wheel," and it is far and away the most important part of the watch. It controls the power of the spring, and measures that power off in equal beats. If you hold a watch to your ear you will notice how evenly it ticks. Now, if it were not for the balance-wheel, there would be no regularity, and the watch would be useless for telling the time.

From all this I want you to see how important it is, not only that you should have power, but that it should always be under control, and wisely guided. It is this third kind of power we need if we are going to be what God wants us to be and do what He wants us to do. If you possess this power, you will be saved from wasting your strength. Such a lot of strength

goes to waste through not being under proper control. There are some horses which, if not held in firmly when driven, will knock themselves up in a few miles, but which, if properly handled, will travel all day, and finish at night as fresh as paint. Now, there are men like that who do not live half their days, because they wear themselves out through badly managing their strength. Then again, if you have this kind of power, you will be saved from going just by fits and starts. You will be more even in your going, like a watch, and other fellows will be able to look at you, and regulate their lives by yours. One good clock in a town fixes the time for all the rest, and one good life makes the pace for other lives. Here, then, there are these three kinds of power,—standing power, cleaving power, and controlling power,—and you need them all. But the question is where are you to find them, and the text gives you the answer, “In the Lord.” You are to be strong “in Christ.”

But, some boy says, “How can I be strong in someone else?” Why, easily! Here is a fellow comes in from school, and flings his books down, when his mother, hearing him, calls out

"George! I want you to go a message for me to the post office." But George remembers that there is a fellow down by the post office that "owes it to him," and threatened the next time he came that way he would thump his nose. Of course he does not want to go, and suggests that his sister shall be sent instead. But his mother says that he must go himself. Now, it would take only five minutes to go to the post office from George's house by the shortest cut. But that would lead straight past this fellow's gate, and as he is not game to meet him because he is not strong enough to fight, he must track round by the back streets and take a quarter of an hour. But next day George's big brother is going to the post office, and he calls out "George! George! I am going down the town; would you like to come?" Oh yes, George wants to go; what boy doesn't want to go with his big brother? But, then, he has to go right past that fellow's house. Well, what of that? He has got his brother with him now. He has confidence in his brother. He knows that all his brother's strength, and all his brother's walking stick too, will be on his side if any one tries to touch him. And so he walks on cheer-

fully. He would like to meet the other fellow now, just to let him see how strong he is. And sure enough just as they turn the corner, there he is swinging on his gate. But George just slips his hand into his brother's and pulls a face at the boy as much as to say: "Come on now if you dare," and he wishes that he would.

Now Christ is your Elder Brother. In Him you can do all things and need not be afraid of anything or anyone. Just slip your hand into His, and walk with Him along your way, and you will be able to laugh to scorn the Devil's power while by your Saviour's side.

VI

The Secret of Strength

VI

The Secret of Strength

For three or four chapters we have been speaking of "power," and you have seen that if you are to stand against temptation, and put it under your feet, Jesus Christ must come into your life. This is the very thing He wants to do. The door through which He comes is your will, and that door must be opened by you. If ever we are beaten by temptation it just serves us right; for the power to win is at our door, knocking and asking to come in.

But if you say, "We do not understand how, by just saying, 'I will' to Jesus Christ, He can come into our lives, and make us strong!" No more do I, but that does not matter as long as He does it. When you come in hungry from school and your mother cuts you a thick slice of bread and butter, you do not say, "I will not eat this till I understand how taking this food into my mouth and then swallowing it takes away my hunger, and makes me feel strong."

62 The Beauty of Strength

You just eat it and ask no questions as to "How." And even if someone explained the whole thing to you, the bread and butter would not do you a bit more good. If you never took any more food till you understood how it got turned into strength of body and mind you would very soon starve. Sometimes people take it into their heads that they will not eat, and doctors have to pump food into them to keep up their strength. But then such people are mad, and cause great grief and anxiety to their friends. Now it is just as mad a thing to keep Christ out of our lives because we cannot understand how His coming in makes us strong. Those who have let Him in know that He does it; and they do not bother about the "how."

One day I was invited to join a party of about thirty doctors to watch a professor of mesmerism perform some of his wonderful feats. The professor had invited the doctors to a private exhibition of his power. We all gathered round him in a ring, and he took four men who gave themselves up to his will. The first thing he did was to "will" them to go to sleep, and in an instant they were all in the land of dreams. The profesor then told the

doctors that they might examine them to see whether they were "shamming" or not. So Dr. Neild, one of the cleverest and most honorable of Melbourne doctors, tested them one after the other, and declared them to be truly asleep. After this the professor "willed" that they should feel no pain, no matter what was done to them. Then he took a long darning needle threaded with coarse thread, and, drawing out the tongue of the first man, as he lay upon the floor, he put the needle clean through it, and drew the thread through, with which he then bobbed the man's head up and down on the platform. It looked a very cruel and painful thing; but the professor told us that the man felt nothing, and when the doctors examined him, and felt his pulse, they said it was perfectly true. After doing quite a number of very wonderful things that I have not time to tell you of now, he took one of the men and "willed" him to be stiff. He then got two of the doctors to lift him up and put the back of his head on the back of one chair, and his heels on the back of another, so that he was stretched out between the two chairs like a log of wood. If you try to put yourself in such a position

64 The Beauty of Strength

you will find how hard it is. Well, he not only made him bear himself up in that position, but he asked one of the heaviest doctors present to come and sit astride him. A well-known doctor stepped out and sat across his waist. The weight made the man arch downwards like the letter C on its back. But then the most wonderful thing happened. The professor just stood and spread his hands over the head of the doctor, as he sat there, and slowly but surely, before our eyes, the man arched up like the letter C on its face, with the heavy doctor on him all the while! Somehow, the strength of the professor passed into the man, and made him strong. How, nobody could tell. The doctors asked the professor how he did it, and he confessed that it was all a mystery to him, and that he had asked them, as clever men, to come and explain it if they could. They all gave it up. But there was no denying it, for they had seen it with their own eyes, and touched it with their own hands. In some way that cannot yet be explained, the professor's strength entered through the door of their will into these men's bodies, so that they were able to do what, without him, would have been impossible.

Now, how Jesus Christ can so come into our lives and make us do what would be otherwise impossible I cannot tell you. But He does it in thousands of lives every day, that just give up their wills to His, and He will do it for you if you will let Him. Unless you do, you have no chance of success against temptation. It is not as though you could refuse to face your temptation. You have to fight; and it is no use running away. Wherever you go you have to wrestle; and one of two things must always happen. You must either get temptation under, or it will get you under. This fight never ends in a "draw." You must win or lose; and it will make all the difference in character here, and in destiny hereafter, as to which of these you do.

Do not be deceived by the thought that the sin you indulged in was only a little one. Of course I do not say that sins are all equally great, but they all belong to the same family, and have a habit of introducing one another. Little sins, as we call them, open the door to big ones. Have you read "Oliver Twist," by Dickens? I hope so; but if you have not, read it at once. Oliver was a little half-starved

66 The Beauty of Strength

work-house boy, who fell into the hands of a big, burly burglar named Bill Sikes, who used to "crack cribs" as he called it, that is, to break into people's houses, and steal all their gold, and silver and precious jewels. Well, one day Bill Sikes saw a beautiful house that he was sure was worth breaking into. But the windows were all bolted and the doors were barred, and the servants were all honest, so that it looked as if there were no chance at all of getting in. But suddenly, he saw a little tiny window belonging to a pantry at the back of the house. This was enough for him, and he chuckled away to himself as he thought out his plan. He could not get in through this small window himself, but Oliver could. So one dark night he took Oliver by the hand, and with one of his "pals," Toby Crackit, he came to the house. He lifted Oliver up and pushed him through the little window, and he had to slip quietly along the passage and pull back the bolts of the big hall door, and let in the two burglars who would be waiting at the front. But if you have read the story you will remember that it did not come off, but something else did, very much to Bill Sikes' surprise.

Now, the thing that failed that night has too often succeeded with you and me. There has been some little half-starved sin, which we have only fed, perhaps, about once a month, and it has been allowed to creep into our hearts unnoticed, but it has slipped the bolts for the big sins that were waiting outside, and they have come trooping in to rob us of all our moral wealth, and lay our houses desolate and waste. Then, too, do not be fooled by the thought that it is only one sin that you commit, and that it doesn't matter much. How many diseases does it take to kill a man's body? Why, only one! A man does not need to have disease of the heart, and inflammation of the lungs, and typhoid fever, be shot through the head, and fall out of a sky-scraper window and break his neck, in order to die. If any one of these troubles has its own way with him, it is a case. And just as one disease will kill the body, so one sin indulged in will kill the soul.

Now, I suppose most of you think that if it were not for temptation, you could be very good. It is the temptations that upset us. You get up in the morning, and sit on the edge of your bed, and as you pull on your socks you say

68 The Beauty of Strength

to yourself, "I did a mean thing yesterday, and had a bad time. I won't do it any more." And you mean it too; but your resolution has just been made when up comes a temptation, and down you go. You know all about it, so do I, and so does everyone, for we have all been there. "Well," you say, "why, if God wants us to be good, does He allow us to be tempted?" The answer to this is that temptations are the only means through which goodness can get practice, and, through practice, get perfect. But suppose we leave that for the next chapter, when we will discuss some of the uses of temptation.

VII

The Uses of Temptation

VII

The Uses of Temptation

Temptation finds you out. No one knows what sort of a fellow a boy is until he has been tempted. Indeed, he does not know himself. Temptation tries him. It gets at his heart. One of the words for temptation in the Bible means to pierce, to get through the covering of things, and find out what lies beneath. This is just what temptation does. It takes no notice of fine clothes, or a pleasant face. It pushes its way behind all these, and wants to know what lives there, and bring it to the front. It gives us many painful surprises, sometimes, by what it discovers and brings out. No one would dream of all the mean and horrid things that lie hidden in our hearts, till temptation stirs them up and makes them creep out.

I remember once having to buy a cheese. A plump and cheery-looking storeman, with a lovely white apron, came up smilingly as I entered the shop. There were cheeses every-

where, on the floor, on the shelves, on the scales, and on the counter. Walking up to a row of respectable looking cheeses, which were nicely arranged where everyone could see them, I said, "One of these will do for me." And the man in the white apron smiled a broad, good-natured smile, and twinkled knowingly with his merry eyes as he chortled in his joy. I asked him what he was laughing at, and he said, "They are not cheeses at all, just hit one of them with this," and he gave me a bright steel thing, which he called a "trier." I did what he told me, and the thing I thought was a cheese was only a tin dummy, and gave out a sound like a cracked bullock-bell. Didn't he laugh, though! "Now," he said, reaching to an upper shelf and lifting down a heavy fellow to the counter, "this is the sort of thing you want; just lend me that trier for a moment, please." Then he took it and plunged it right into the heart of the cheese, and after giving it a turn round, pulled it out again, and put what he got on a sheet of white paper. But, O my! it gave me the creeps to see it. It would not stay on the paper, we had to keep on bringing it back. It was the liveliest bit of cheese I had ever seen.

It was playing leap-frog and fly-the-garter all over the place. If I had taken it home, I am sure it would not have stayed there; it would have scampered off into the back-yard. It wasn't the kind of cheese I wanted at all. Some people prefer that kind, I know, but I like a cheese that will stay at home and that hasn't to be chained up and watched all the time, for fear it should wander and get lost. But you see, I would not have known what it was like inside only for the "trier" that went to its heart.

Now temptation is a "trier." It finds you out. Temptation puts a strain on you. It tests your strength. What is the first thing a boy does when he picks up a piece of string? Why, he tries to break it. I never saw a boy yet pick up a bit of string without testing it; that is, "tempting" it to see how strong it is. You watch the next boy you see picking up string, and you will see him twist it round his hand and pull. If it doesn't break, a look of satisfaction comes into his face, and he tucks it into the pocket of his knickers. When he gets home, he hunts all round the house for his mother, and when he finds her he wants her to make some paste. What does he want with paste? Why,

74 The Beauty of Strength

he is going to make a kite, of course, and it does not in the least matter what his mother is doing. She may be entertaining visitors in the drawing-room, or ironing his father's white shirts in the kitchen, but she has to drop everything and go into the paste business, if only for the sake of peace. Presently you see my noble out on the back verandah with newspapers, scissors, sticks, and his pot of paste. Then in a very little while there is paste everywhere, on the floor, on the wall, on the verandah posts, all over the door handle, down the front of his blouse, and in his very hair. He stands in it, sits in it, kneels in it, wallows in it to his heart's content. Indeed, it is just wonderful how far a boy can make a little paste go when he really makes up his mind to it. But never mind, there lies his shapely kite only waiting for its fixings, when into his pocket goes his hand, and out comes the piece of string which he is going to work in for the band of his kite. It is just the very thing he wants, not too thick, but very strong. He knows, because don't you remember he tested it on the way home! But just as he is fixing it on, his mate comes round the side of the house, and looking at the thinness of the

string, says, "I say, Bill, that there bit of string ain't any good for a band! it's too thin!" "No, it isn't," says Bill. "How d'yer know?" says his mate. "Because I tried it," says Bill, "and I know what this bit of string can do." "Well, I don't think it's strong enough," says his mate still unsatisfied. "Well now, look here," says Bill, "whose kite is this, yours or mine?" "Oh well, I suppose it's yours." "All right, you just leave me alone, see! I know what I'm doing."

And so he does, and by and by, when he flies that kite, the string he tested and trusted does not disappoint him. He tested, tried, tempted it, and because it came through all right and did not break down, he gave it that most important place in his kite. Now, that is just what God does. He allows temptation to put a strain upon you, and if you do not break down He gives you some important place to fill and some important work to do. People sometimes are surprised at the work God calls quite young people to do. Like Bill's mate they don't think that this boy or that girl is quite up to what is expected of them, and sometimes they say so. But God knows His boys and His girls. He has watched them during the testing time, and

76 The Beauty of Strength

when He trusts them with some important task they do not disappoint the expectation of His love.

But supposing a bit of string breaks when a boy tests it, does he throw it away? No fear! I never saw a boy throw away a bit of string yet. Why, a boy has need of all kinds of string. Rotten string, strong string, blue string, white string, thick string, thin string. Sometimes a boy will fetch a whole heap of string out of his pocket; and if you happen to want a piece and show him which, he will be sure to say he can't give you that piece. He has been saving it up for something special for a long time. And it would have been all the same whatever piece you might have fancied. No, a boy never throws away string, so if a piece breaks when he tries it, he just ties a knot in it and puts it in the other pocket to wait for its chance. Soon it comes, for when that kite we were speaking about is nearly finished, there is something else that has to be put to it. What is that! Why a tail, of course. A kite is of no use without a tail!

So out comes the piece of string that broke down under temptation; and as the boy looks at

it he says, "Well, I couldn't use you for a band, you know, because you are not strong enough and you broke down, but I'm going to work you in for a tail; there won't be so much strain on you there." And so the piece of string that failed in the hour of temptation is not thrown away, you see, but gets another chance. And God does not throw us away because we break down under temptation. No, He is very loving and hopeful. Because His love is infinite, it will not allow His hope in us to die. Some have broken down very often, and God cannot perhaps give them the place in His Church that He would like to give them. They might have been at the head, had they been faithful; but they have broken down so often, that God has had to work them into the tail. O that you who read these pages may stand the strain of temptation, and be thus fitted and chosen for high and honourable places in the Church and in the world. And if anyone should happen to read this, even among those who are not children, those who have frequently failed at the testing points of their history, and through unfaithfulness are at the tail instead of at the head, then let me say to you, Be a good tail! Do not disappoint God

78 The Beauty of Strength

even in the lowly place. The tail is not unimportant. Many a cricket match has been saved from defeat by the tail, and many a good enterprise has failed because at a critical moment the tail dropped off. I remember as a boy having a lovely kite, and about a hundred yards of string, and I lost the kite, and nearly all the string, because the tail dropped off down someone's chimney. Wherever you are, then, whether in the high or in the lowly place, be faithful and do not disappoint the expectation of your Heavenly Father's heart.

Now we have seen that temptation tests us; that it finds us out, and shows us what we are. But it does more than this. It strengthens us; that is, if we come through all right.

A piece of string is no stronger after it is tested than it was before. Even if it does not break down under the strain, it gains nothing from it. It does not go on winning fresh strength out of every trial. But we do. Every temptation that we successfully resist makes us stronger to meet the next.

Suppose that I have a gold piece which has somehow got discolored, and, when I want to change it, the man behind the counter objects,

and won't believe that it is genuine. I tell him that it is all right, but he shakes his head, rings the coin two or three times on the counter, looks doubtful, and refuses to pass it. Presently he says, "I'll tell you what. There's a chemist next door; if you will let him test this coin with a powerful acid, and it comes through all right, I'll pass it." Of course, I agree, because I know it is a genuine coin. So in we go to the chemist's, and tell him our trouble. He takes down a bottle of acid and looks very wise. Just before he touches my coin with it, he tells us that if it be a bad one it will immediately turn green when the acid touches it; while, if it be a good one, it will remain just the same. Then, dropping a glass tube into the bottle, he touches my coin with a drop of the acid, and we all watch to see how it will behave. Everything happens just as I expected. The coin is genuine, and comes through the testing time with credit.

But the question is, Is it any better now than it was before? Not a bit. Can I get a little more than its value for it now? Certainly not! It is not worth a cent more after the test than it was before. But, it is not so with us. If we

80 The Beauty of Strength

come through the tests of temptation we are worth more. We become stronger, and nobler, and purer; we are better able to face the temptations of to-morrow, when we have overcome the temptations of to-day. Do you know that there was a belief among the aborigines who used to run wild about Australia, that whenever they killed a man in fair fight they inherited his strength? That is to say, if one of these fellows killed another, all the strength of the man that was dead passed into the man that killed him, and so, of course, the more fellows he killed, the stronger he became. Now, that is all nonsense about these aborigines; but it is sober truth about temptations. Every temptation that you master and get beneath your feet will make you so much stronger than ever you were before.

This is why God allows us to be tempted, that we may win out of our temptations a finer and more enduring strength. Temptation does for our souls what the gymnasium does for our bodies; it fetches up our moral muscle. I used to think like you do that if I only had God's power, I would put temptation clean out of the world, and thus make it easy for people to be

good. I don't think so now; for temptation is the school for training out our strength, and not only our strength, but our beauty too.

There was a little girl in Australia who was very fond of collecting butterflies and beetles. If you went into her room you would see all sorts of creeping and flying things. Some alive, and others dead and pinned to the wall, or fixed in glass boxes. If you opened a box on the mantelpiece out would creep a centipede; if you lifted a tumbler that was turned upside down, out would come a tarantula, you never knew what you were going to find in that girl's room. Well, one day she was at the Museum when the curator was unpacking and fixing some very beautiful butterflies in their cases. She had never seen any as lovely in color before, and she went into ecstasies of delight. The curator knew her a little, for he had seen her there often; so he said that if she liked she might have one of these butterflies for herself, but it would be in its chrysalis state, and she must take it home and wait for it to come out. Of course she was delighted, and thanking him warmly she started home with her prize. She put it on the mantelpiece, and waited for its

82 The Beauty of Strength

coming out for more than a week. When one morning she went to look, there to her delight, the butterfly was out of his prison, and fluttering away on the top of the empty chrysalis. She could not see the beauty of the wings, because they were fluttering so fast.

Well, that little thing kept on fluttering so long that she got tired of seeing it, and began to wonder why it did not stop. Presently she saw that it was not quite free, it seemed held by a tiny little thread to the chrysalis shell. "Ah!" she said, "that is it! The poor little thing can't get loose, and that is why it is struggling so. I'll soon put that all right." So running over to her work-box she took out a tiny pair of scissors and just snipped the thread that held the butterfly captive to the shell. Presently feeling itself free, it settled down, and its wings became perfectly still. But what was her disappointment to find, when she looked, that it was not nearly so beautiful as the ones she had seen at the museum. So she made up her mind to tell the curator the very next time she saw him. It was not long after that she met him, and he said, "Well, how did your butterfly turn out?" So she looked at him in a very dissatisfied way

and said, "I don't think you're a bit nice, you told me that it was going to be as beautiful as those you were putting in the cases, and it isn't nearly as pretty." "Oh," said he, "what did you do to it?" "I never did anything." "Oh, yes, you must have, or it would have been just the same. Come, now! What did you do?" "Why, I didn't do any harm, I only helped it a little." "Helped it! What do you mean?" "Why, the poor thing was struggling so hard and so long that I felt quite sorry for it." "You surely didn't set it free to stop its struggles?" "Yes, I did." "Oh, you silly girl, no wonder it is not so beautiful as mine. Why, don't you know that when the butterfly comes out of the chrysalis first, its wings are all crumpled up and weak, and the colors are all dull; but it is so fixed by that tiny thread that it has to struggle for freedom, and in these struggles the wings grow in strength and beauty. You have 'helped' the butterfly; but, ah! you have forever spoiled its beauty."

That is why temptation comes into our lives, that we may have to struggle, and through struggle, grow in beauty and in strength. God wants to make us strong and beautiful, with a

84 The Beauty of Strength

strength and a beauty that will outlast the stars. He wants to bring out the best that is in us, and so He has set us where we shall have to struggle and wrestle. But do not be afraid. You need never be beaten. All God's power is at your back. The devil can do a great many things; but he can never cut off our supplies. He can never tempt us above what we are able to bear nor come between us and our Great Captain Christ. Always fall back on your Saviour's strength, and you will find that in every struggle His arm will sustain you, and His presence will cheer.

VIII

The Girdle

VIII

The Girdle

"Having your loins girt about with truth."

EPHESIANS vi. 14

We are now to see how Paul took the Roman soldier's armour piece by piece and found a moral meaning in every part of it, with its lesson for you and me. Now although the girdle is the first thing he mentions it was really the last thing, which after putting on his armour he buckled round his waist. It held all the other pieces together, and kept them in place. Without the girdle, they would shift about while he fought, and thus make him both uncomfortable and unsafe. You know what an uncomfortable thing it is to have things loose and uncertain about the waist. Why, even girls have been known to tighten up round the waist, and they don't have to fight. Somehow, we all like to have a feeling of togetherness round the loins, especially when there is any work to be done. Now, that is the feeling which the girdle gave to

88 The Beauty of Strength

the Roman soldier. It sort of braced him up and kept him together. The other parts of the armour were valuable only as they were kept in their proper place, and this is what the girdle did. You know that in football or cricket or in running a race, it is a wretched thing to have your belt too loose. You cannot do half as well as when it is tightened up. You have a centre to work from, and feel quite fit when you have taken it up a hole or two. Now, Paul knew all this about the girdle, and what an important part it had to fill in fixing up the soldier for the fight. So he began to wonder what thing that was, which like the Roman soldier's girdle, must be worn by the Christian soldier if he too is to feel comfortable and secure. It does not take him long to find that out. The one thing that can gird a man round with strength and safety is truth, and so he says, "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth."

Now, the word "truth" has many meanings. In this text it may mean either or all of three things: Something to be known, something to be spoken, something to be done. We speak of knowing the truth about a thing. This gives a feeling of comfort. There is never any com-

fort in doubt. Suppose you live half an hour's walk from the railway station, and that you have to catch a train to-morrow morning; but you don't know whether it starts at six or seven. You have not taken the trouble to find out the truth about the train, and it worries you before you go to bed, because you don't want to oversleep yourself, and yet you don't want to get up too early. At half-past five you wake with a start, and scramble into your clothes anyhow. A lovely little breakfast is ready for you of toast and eggs, for your mother has been up since before five. But you feel too anxious to want to eat, for you are not sure as to whether you have time. So with your shoes only half fastened, and your vest fixed up with the bottom button in the second button-hole, you try to take your coffee standing, only to scald your tongue in your hurry, and then, snatching up a piece of bread in one hand and your bag in the other, you coast off to the station as hard as you can tear, only to find when you get there at six that you have an hour to wait, for your train doesn't start till seven. There is not time to go back and get your breakfast, and so you sit there, hungry, hurried, and shaken up gen-

90 The Beauty of Strength

erally, while other people quietly walk on to the platform at five minutes to seven, looking comfortable and happy, for they have had their breakfast without being rushed, because they knew the truth about the train. Then you think about your eggs and toast, and what a time you would have had if you had only known. But then you didn't know, and so you have had all this worry and hurry just to sit hungry and miserable on the platform and cool your heels for an hour, when you might have been as happy as a king!

It is a grand thing to know the truth about a thing, even if it is only a time-table. It gives you such a feeling of safety, and saves you from being hustled out of breath. The Bible says: "He that believeth shall not make haste." This is true even about everyday things. But Paul was thinking and speaking about other and higher things than those of earth and time. He was thinking of the truth about God being our Father, and Jesus being our Saviour, and Heaven being our home. Whatever else you may be tempted to doubt, hold fast to this. It is a truth you can always be sure of, whatever else may be uncertain, and the knowledge of it

will gird you round with strength; it will save you from hurry and worry, and will brace you up to bear the burdens and to fight the battles of your life. The man who is not sure about things can never be happy or safe. Certainty is the only thing that can give comfort. Don't you see that to be certain in your mind is the only way to be certain in your actions? You must be sure in your thinking to be sure in your working. You know how true this is in sums. If you are working out a new example in arithmetic, and you come to a place where you are not certain as to whether you ought to multiply or divide, all that you do will be doubtful because of the doubt in your mind. Of course, you may chance to do the right thing, but then, you don't know that it is right, so that for all the comfort it is to you, it might as well be wrong.

If you have ever lost your way in the bush, you will know what this feeling is. You cannot walk along comfortably or confidently when you are not sure whether you are getting nearer home, or whether every step is taking you farther away. Have you ever seen a dog lose the scent when he has been after a hare? He runs

92 The Beauty of Strength

round and round, with his nose to the ground; then he doubles back on his tracks; then he stops, and, lifting one of his paws from the ground, holds it up in doubt, and raises his nose in the air, as if he were trying to sniff which way to go from the wind; then off again, working round and round in circles, and trying to pick up the trail of his game. That is a very unhappy moment for a dog. He is uncertain in his mind, and, of course, he is uncertain in his running. Paul, in one of his letters to the Corinthians, tells them that he does not run like that. He knows where he is going. He does not waste any time fooling round. "So run I not as uncertainly"—not like a dog that has lost the scent, but like a hound that is hot on the trail. But this fine going came of knowing. Paul's knowledge of the truth braced him up to do his very best, and saved him from wasting his strength. It kept him well together. No strength was spent in worry because of doubt; every ounce went into his work.

What knowledge of the truth did for him it will do for you if you get it and gird yourself with it. But this is a kind of truth that you must get to know for yourself. A truth that

you get to know for yourself becomes yours in a way that it could never become by only hearing it from someone else. Take, for example, the truth about that train I spoke of just now. If you had such an experience, you would not require a time-table in future to tell you that it started at seven o'clock. You found it out for yourself, and you never forget a thing you learn like that. Of course, there are some truths that you had better not get to know for yourself. It is wiser and safer to take another person's word for them. If the chemist puts a "poison" label on a bottle of liniment that comes into your house, that is the truth about it: but you had better not set about knowing it for yourself, unless you wish to give your friends a half-holiday to attend your funeral. You will find that it saves a lot of trouble, and expense, too, to take the chemist's word for it in such a case. But there are other truths that you must get to know for yourself if you are to be girt about with strength to "stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Every boy and girl may get to know that God is their Father, that He knows them each, and calls them each by name. This is the great-

94 The Beauty of Strength

est truth in the world. It is the truth that Jesus came all the way from heaven to earth to teach. He came to tell us the truth about God, to let us see into His heart, and to show us that we each have a place there, that no one else can fill. When you have got to know this for yourself, when you are able to look up into His face and say "My Father!" and hear Him say to you "My Child," you will find yourself circled round with a strength and comfort that nothing else can give. Because if God is your Father, that means that all His power and wisdom and love will be for you whenever you need them, and that is always. His power to protect you, His wisdom to guide you, and His love to caress you and fold you to His heart.

But truth is not only something to be known; it is also something to be spoken and done. To be truthful and honest in speech and action, will give you a feeling of security and fearlessness that nothing can destroy. I have not time to speak about these things. Some other day, and under another text, we may have a talk together along these lines. But be truthful and thorough, no matter what it costs. Have nothing to do with make-believes. Mere pretence

may seem to succeed, but it is only for a time, and the pretender is always in fear and trembling lest he should be bowled out. There is no security in anything but the truth, whether in thinking or speaking or doing. Above all things else then be thorough, and sincere.

“Whatsoe’er you find to do,
Do it, boys, with all your might!
Never be a little true,
Or a little in the right.
Trifles even
Lead to heaven,
Trifles make the life of man.
So in all things,
Great or small things,
Be as thorough as you can.

“Let no speck their surface dim—
Spotless truth and honor bright!
I’d not give a fig for him
Who says any lie is white!
He who falters,
Twists, or alters
Little atoms, when we speak,
May deceive me;
But, believe me,
To himself he is a sneak!”

IX

The Breastplate

IX

The Breastplate

"Having on the breastplate of righteousness."

EPHESIANS vi. 14

Last time we had to do with the girdle of truth, or right-thinking. To-day we have to deal with the breastplate of righteousness, or right doing.

The Roman soldier wore the breastplate to protect his heart. You will remember that the girdle held the breastplate in its place and kept it from shifting round. That means that right-thinking is necessary to right-doing. It is not enough to know what is right. Most of you know well enough what you ought to do; it is the doing it that tangles you up. It is not through want of knowing better that you so often get into trouble; but through want of doing what you know. Now, to know without doing is like going into battle with the girdle on, but no breastplate. What is the use of knowing that school begins at half past nine if you

100 The Beauty of Strength

don't turn up till ten? Don't you see that it makes things all the worse when you know the right and yet do the wrong! If you didn't know, you might be excused. I say "might be," because it all depends upon whether you could have known or not. Where it is possible to know it becomes wrong to be ignorant. Suppose you go up to the Zoo some day, and commence to annoy the birds and animals, and when you are caught you say you didn't know it was wrong! Do you think you would be let off, even if it were true? Not much! Because you should have known, for just at the entrance there is a big board telling you the things you must not do, so that in such a case ignorance is no excuse.

Of course, wrong-headedness cannot always be helped. The best-intentioned people may make blunders. But to know what is right and to go straight away and do the wrong is wrongness of heart and is not to be excused. The trouble with most of us is not with our heads, but with our hearts. Righteousness, then, is a matter of the heart; that is why it is called the breastplate. Now, it is the heart that rules the life. Unless, therefore, it is put right and

kept right, it is of no use trying to make hands or feet or tongue behave. Suppose that the hands of my watch keep going wrong, so that when I look for the time I am never sure as to whether it is telling me the truth. What is to be done? It is no use dealing with the hands; it is not their fault. I may twist them round and put them right to the very second with the post office clock; but what's the use of that? They will commence immediately to go wrong again. The trouble is deeper. The watch is wrong at heart. It must be dealt with at its centre. So I take it to the watchmaker. He opens it up, puts a strong magnifying glass to his eye, and looks inside. After peering and poking for a few minutes, he says "Ah!" and if you heard him you would think he was very sorry for me, by the tone of his voice; but you would be mistaken for that is only a little way that he's got. As a matter of fact, he is very glad, but you would never gather it from his manner. He looks very serious, and says that he must keep it for a week or two, for there is something very wrong inside, which may or may not be true. But then, you see, he could not very well charge me three or four dollars for what would take

102 The Beauty of Strength

him only half a minute to do. So he has to keep up appearances, and in order to make up for the wrong of overcharging me, he inflicts a further wrong by keeping me without my watch for a fortnight longer than he ought. As the trouble, however, is internal, and I cannot deal with it myself, I have no choice but just to leave it with him.

Now, supposing him to be a man who understands his business, and does it, when I get that watch back it will have been so changed inwardly that outwardly it will be right; whereas before it used to deceive and mislead, now it will tell the truth. It has been put right at heart; and as the hands are ruled by the heart, when it is made truthful, so are they. Now, truly as the hands of a watch are governed by its heart, so are yours. That is why the Bible attaches so much importance to the heart being right. It never troubles about mere appearances. It pushes past all that is outward, taking no notice of fine clothes or fine looks. It takes the rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, and holds him up to shame and everlasting contempt, because his heart was mean and narrow and selfish; while it shows Lazarus, in spite of poverty

and rags, and because his heart was pure, being borne to heaven, attended by an angel guard.

The great thing, then, is to be right at heart. Now, just as the watch that is inwardly wrong must be taken to the watchmaker, so the heart that is wrong must be taken to the heartmaker. God says to every lad and girl: "My son, my daughter, give me thine heart." If you will but let Him, He will set you right, and keep you right. The other day the tuner came to fix our piano. He has to come about once every three months to tune things up and keep the instrument in tune, because the changes in the weather make changes in the strings. Now, suppose that the next time that he comes, I could put him inside the instrument and keep him there, why, it would not matter then what sort of weather it was, he would always keep the thing in tune. Now, that is just what Christ promises to do. He offers to come into the heart, to live there, to put it in tune, and keep it in tune, until by and by its music shall blend with the deep, full music of the skies. Such a righteousness as Jesus thus works in the heart becomes a breastplate, protecting it from harm. The best defence from attack is right-doing. It is

104 The Beauty of Strength

not enough to be doing no harm, because that would lay the heart open to assault. The boy or girl that isn't doing anything, is always in danger. It is a terribly risky thing to be unemployed. The devil is always looking after people who are out of work, and offering them a job. The best safeguard from doing wrong is doing right. Doing right is always in season. It does not go out like football and cricket. You know how you get "out of form" in a game because it "goes out" as we say, and it takes some time at practice to get your hand and eye in at the beginning of the season. Now, don't get out of practice in doing right; keep it up all the year round. It is a game you can always play, winter and summer, night and day, and it will weave a breastplate of safety around you that all the darts of the devil will never be able to pierce.

X

The Sandals

X

The Sandals

"Having your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace."

EPHESIANS vi. 15

The Roman soldier wore boots, or sandals, the soles of which were thickly studded with big-headed nails, to keep him from slipping and sliding about. It is very important, even in a game, to keep on your feet; but in a battle it may prove a matter of life or death. To slip is to give the other side a great advantage. Then, again, in marching, a soldier needs all his strength, and there is nothing that so wastes strength as to be slipping about and finding no certain foothold from which to spring your step. You soon get exhausted in walking on a wet day and on greasy soil if your feet can get no firm hold of the ground. Those of you who live in cities know how hard it is even for horses—and they have four legs to your two—to keep their footing on the wooden blocks or

108 The Beauty of Strength

asphalt after a shower. Either they have to be shod specially, to keep them from falling, or else sand has to be sprinkled about, so that they can get a grip of the road. While those of you who live in the country will know that in some parts at any rate, where the soil is very rich, horses need shoes specially made with heels, or they could not get along. It takes a lot more out of a horse if he slips about and cannot get firm foothold when he pulls. One mile of that sort of thing would leave him more knocked out than five of straight-forward pulling when every ounce of strength goes into his work. Why, even a locomotive must not be allowed slip on the rails, or it will strain all its parts. That is why every engine carries a sand-box, from which a little pipe leads down on to the lines, so that on wet or frosty mornings when the rails are greasy the driver can trickle out sand in front of the driving wheel and get a grip of the road. An engine-driver told me that, one frosty morning, in travelling with a heavy load of steel rails, his engine commenced to slip—that is, the wheels went round and round without gripping, and it threw such an extra strain on the left-hand side-rod that

it broke. This gave the right-hand rod more to do than it could manage, and so it broke also, and his disabled engine had to lie up for repairs.

You can always tell when an engine is slipping, for instead of the steady and regular "puff, puff, puff," you hear it going "puff-puff-puff puff"; while all the time it stops about the same place. This shows that sand is needed on the rails to give grip to the wheels; and unless this is done, the slipping will strain and perhaps break either cranks or rods. Now, if a dead, dumb thing of wheels and pistons and cranks can thus suffer through not getting proper foothold, is it any wonder that living creatures should be worn out and lose their strength when they can find no proper hold for their feet? But firm foothold not only saves your strength, it gives a sense of safety. If you are not sure as to whether you can stand up and keep your feet, you feel afraid, and when you feel afraid you can never do your best, either in the examination-room or the playground. You know what it is to get into what's called a "funk" when you are batting. A bowler is put on who knows your weak spot, and always gets

110 The Beauty of Strength

your wicket. While the field is changing over, you hitch up your flannels, look nervously round, and ask for "block." Then a film comes over your eyes, your heart beats fast, you feel that, somehow, there is not enough air to go all round so that everyone can have a share. Anyhow, you cannot get a deep, full breath, and when the umpire calls "Play," something tells you that the end is come. You have made up your mind before the ball is delivered (always a bad thing) that you will play "forward," then just as it leaves the bowler's hand you change your mind and determine to play "back"; but at the last moment you get so flurried that you do neither; the ball slips in between your legs and the bat, and your leg stump goes for a walk! It was just as you expected, and it happened largely because you expected it. Then when you are taking off your pads the fellows come up and want to know whatever made you go out for such a soft thing as that, when you had already played a hundred much more difficult balls. Well, there's only one word that can express it, and that is "funk." You were afraid the bowler would get you, and that is why he did. If you had only made up your

mind not to be afraid, you might have carried out your bat. You must have confidence, whether you are playing a game, or parsing a sentence, or fighting a battle.

Anything that can add to this feeling of confidence in a soldier is important, because in battle a "funk" has a wonderful way of spreading till it becomes a panic, so that the whole company, without knowing why, will break up and run, when, if they had only confidently stood their ground, they might have had an easy win.

The Roman soldier's boot, then, was so made as to give him firm standing, that he might have every advantage that could be got from a solid footing when he met his foe. I wish that I could give you a picture of these military sandals—"caligæ," the Romans called them—but you have perhaps seen spiked shoes such as cricketers or tennis players wear who play on turf, and that will give you some idea of the thing that's meant. Now, Paul says that the thing that will do for you what the Roman soldier's sandals did for him is the "preparation of the Gospel of peace." This is the thing

112 The Beauty of Strength

with which you must be shod or in which your feet are to find footing that cannot be moved.

The English word "preparation" in our text does not make Paul's meaning very clear. I think I have told you before that this letter was written in Greek. Now, you know that a word in English, without changing its spelling, may have quite a number of different meanings. Well, it is just the same in Greek, and sometimes you can find out what is meant only by a very careful study of everything that has been said before, and by comparing the different uses of the word by different men. Now, it is a word of this sort that Paul uses, and which has been translated "preparation." Even very great scholars have been puzzled as to what he meant. Bishop Ellicott, one of the cleverest of Greek scholars, says that the word Paul uses does not mean in this place "preparation," but "foundation," or "base," just as we should speak of the "foundation" of a house or the "base" of a mountain, by which we should mean something very firmly set and solid. This is what it means in the Greek copy of the Old Testament, in Psalm lxxxix. 14: "Righteousness and judgment are the 'founda-

tion' of Thy throne"; and in Ezra iii. 3, "And they set the altar upon his 'base.' "

What Paul wanted to say, then, was this, that our feet must be placed on the solid foundation of the Gospel, just as the Roman soldier's feet were solidly planted on and strapped to his sandals, if we are to find firm footing in our struggle against sin. But what is this Gospel? The word "Gospel" is short for "God's spell," or good-spell. "Spell" is the old English word for "story." So that the Gospel is God's story—that is, the story of God's love for you and me and all mankind! This is the story that Jesus came to tell, and that He died to prove. When we believe it and receive it with all our hearts, we find firm rock beneath our feet, though all around may be sinking sand.

I wonder whether any of you have ever been on a quicksand. I remember doing a very foolish and dangerous thing, which nearly cost me my life. I was on horseback, and not far from the coast, and, hearing the roll of the waves, thought I would give the horse a canter along the beach and bathe his legs. But as soon as I turned his head towards the shore, he got stubborn, and did not want to go. That, of

114 The Beauty of Strength

course, only made me more determined that he should, for someone had told me that you must never let a horse get the mastery, or it will spoil him. I said that this horse should not be spoiled by me, so I used the whip and forced him to the edge of the sand. Then I noticed that he was trembling all over, and inclined to crouch beneath me. Thinking it was just fear of the salt water, I tried to encourage him, told him that it was all right, called him "old fellow," and coaxed him to "get up." Still he stopped and trembled, till at last, getting impatient at what I thought was his cowardice, I gave him some more whip, when, with a bound, as much as to say, "All right, my young master, if you want it, you shall have it, and more than you like," he plunged forward, when, to my terror, no sooner were his forelegs placed on the sand than down they went, right up to the shoulders, nearly sending me over his head. We were nearly gone altogether, and it was only because his hind legs kept the solid ground, that he was able, after one or two struggles, to wheel round with a wild snort and escape from what would have proved certain death to us both. When I got home to the

farm where I was staying and told my story, the old farmer said: "My boy, th' old horse did knaw better than thee; and if he 'adn't, theest wouldn't been here to tell thy tale."

Then he told me dreadful stories of men and horses that had been caught in that quicksand and never got out alive, till my heart stood still with fear. After he had finished, I went out and told the horse how sorry I was for what I had done, and as he held down his dear old face for me to stroke he seemed to know what I was saying, and to be making allowances for a fellow who did not understand. But I shall never forget the joy I felt at knowing that the solid ground was again beneath my feet.

This is just the sort of feeling that the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives you when you set fairly on it with both your feet. But, remember, everyone must find his own footing there. Just as each Roman soldier had to possess and stand in his own sandals, so everyone has to find his own footing on the Gospel of Christ. There is room for everyone, but each for himself must come and find his place. Once

116 The Beauty of Strength

you get both your feet on this solid rock, you will be able to fight without fear of a fall.

In this struggle, then, don't take your stand upon the shifting sand of your own good resolutions, or of what people will think or say, or of what other lads or girls may do or may not do; you will find no sure foothold in any of these places. Stand with both your feet on the "old, old story of Jesus and His love," and nothing can shift you. Here is Rock. All beside is shifting sand. Then by and by, when the last fight has been fought and the last victory has been won, and the hour has come for you to die, you will be able to sing the words and feel them true:

"His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood,
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is shifting sand."

XI

The Shield

XI

The Shield

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

EPHESIANS vi. 16

We do not know much about shields in these days. We only see them in pictures. Some day, when you go to dear old England, you will visit the Tower of London. There you will see the shields and all the armour of the knights who used to clash their battle-axes in the good old days of lance and tourney. These shields belong to a bygone time of spears and arrows, but are useless now, when we have rifles that can pierce through wood, and even iron, at a distance of a thousand yards.

Now, the Roman soldier of Paul's time had two kinds of shields. There was a small round one, that he wore on his left arm in fighting; and there was a large oblong one, 4 feet long and 2 feet 6 inches broad, like a fair-sized door,

120 The Beauty of Strength

which was used in a siege. It was usually made of wood, across which were stretched several folds of tough bullock hide. Now, you know that in war it is a great thing, if possible, to destroy the enemy's supplies of food and ammunition. This is a very old trick, and the Romans knew it well; and so they provided against it. There were, of course, no such things as explosive shells in those days, because gunpowder was not known to the Romans. But their enemies used to wrap around their spears and arrows something that would burn easily, like cloth soaked in oil or pitch. Then, after lighting these, they would let them fly into the camp, or on the tents and baggage, and burn up the forage of the horses and the food of the men. This is where the shields would come in. It was the business of those who carried them to catch these flaming brands before they had time to fall, and put them out. You can quite see that if a dart all blazing with lighted pitch were to drop on to the stacked-up baggage of the troops, there would soon be very little left; and once the camp was burnt, surrender would be a matter of a very few days.

A great deal, then, depended on the smart-

ness of the soldiers in watching and quenching these flaming darts. Now, we have an enemy who would dearly like to interfere with our supplies. If he cannot hurt us the next best thing is to stop them. But then we too, have a shield—something that can come in between us and the darts of our foe, sheltering both ourselves, and our supplies of grace and strength from God. This shield or shelter, says Paul, is our faith—that is, our faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, faith is a thing you often hear about. Perhaps you may have wondered why so much is made of it in the Bible. Everything seems to depend on faith. Of course you know that faith means belief, trust, confidence. You cannot post a letter without faith. Suppose you write to a friend in England, or Australia. It requires faith to believe that by simply putting on a stamp, and dropping it into a hole, it will find its way across the ocean to the house of your friend. But so it is, and if you didn't believe, you would not do it. So that the commonest things we do every day depend on faith. That slice of bread and butter you had for breakfast came through faith. First of all, the

122 The Beauty of Strength

farmer scattered the wheat all over the brown and furrowed soil. That required faith, for if there is anything that looks like wasting good wheat, it is that of scattering it broadcast over the face of the earth. Then, when it is reaped and ready for the mill, the miller buys it because he believes that when he makes it into flour the baker will want it. Then the baker has faith when he makes it into bread that the people will need it, and he leaves it at your house every day, without waiting for the money, because he has faith that some day your father will pay him. So that even in common, everyday things, you see, we could not get along without having faith in one another. You cannot even play a game with a fellow you don't believe in. There is no fun where there's no faith. If you have to be watching the other chap all the time, to see he doesn't cheat, it is not good enough. There must be perfect confidence or there will be no pleasure in your play.

Now, it is because faith is the thing we use every day amongst ourselves that God wants us to use it in our dealing with Him. He has made the answers to our prayers depend upon our belief and trust in Him. He does not promise

to do anything for the man who does not trust Him; but there is almost nothing that He will not do for the man who believes. It is your faith in Christ that brings Him in between you and the fiery darts of the enemy, so that they fall blunted, quenched, and harmless at your feet. Not faith in your own strength, remember, nor in your own smartness and cunning. These can give you no shelter from attack. The sooner we learn how altogether weak and worthless is all our own armour, the safer we shall be. We might as well expect a biscuit to stop a rifle ball as expect that any good resolutions of our own will shield us from the devil's darts. But calm, strong faith in Christ will give us a charmed life amid all his fiery hail. So,

“Take the Name of Jesus with you,
As a shield from every snare.
When temptations round you gather,
Breathe that holy Name in prayer.”

XII

The Helmet

XII

The Helmet

"And take the helmet of salvation."

EPHESIANS vi. 17

The helmet of the Roman soldier was usually made of brass, and was often beautifully plumed and crested. It guarded the head from attack, which was a most important matter, for a crack on the skull may prove a most serious thing. It takes very little to kill a man if you only hit him in the right place on the head. While, then, the helmet was as light in weight as possible, it had also to be made very strong, and fit very closely, lest an arrow should pierce through a crevice and find its way to the brain. Besides, a man wants all his wits about him in a fight, and a knock on the head, even if it did not kill him, might make him do foolish things and fall into the hands of the enemy. A man whose head is not right cannot be trusted. He has to be carefully

128 The Beauty of Strength

watched, or he will get both himself and his friends into trouble. You know we have to put people away in asylums who are wrong in the head, because the head does the thinking, and wrong thinking leads to wrong-doing. This is why the devil tries to put evil thoughts into our minds. Because if he can only get us thinking about evil, we shall very soon be doing it.

Now, no helmet of steel or brass, however close-fitting, can keep out evil thoughts. But they must be kept out if we are going to win in this fight, because thoughts presently pass into wishes, and to wish to do wrong, Jesus tells us, is the same as doing it. We must be saved in our thoughts. We want a salvation that will keep our heads from evil-thinking, and this is the very salvation which Jesus came to give. It is not enough that our feet be kept from running down the broad way; our thoughts must be kept from it, too. Sin always begins in thought. It has first of all to be an intention. If you do not intend to do wrong, even though you may do it, it is not sin. Everything depends upon what you intend. Christ's salvation is like a helmet because it keeps the head

sound, the judgment clear, the intentions right, the thoughts pure.

Jesus Christ then clears the head as well as cleans the heart. Indeed, it is just wonderful how a clean heart makes for a clear head. Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But perhaps you will say, "What has purity of heart got to do with clearness of sight?" A very great deal. Even the heart that you can feel beating in your breast has to be pure if your eyes are to see clearly. There is a disease of the heart to which doctors give a very long name. If I were speaking to you, I don't think I should use it; but as I am writing, perhaps it won't hurt if I spell it for you, and then you can look it up in the dictionary for yourselves. It is called "ulcerative endocarditis," and it means that on the membranes in the cavities of the heart there are little ulcers formed. Now, this is a sign of an impure heart, and this impurity causes certain blood-vessels in the eyes to burst and dim the sight, and, if not cured, to make them totally blind. It would be no use in such a case, you see, to treat the eyes; it is the heart that must be made pure, and then the eyes will come

130 The Beauty of Strength

right. Just as truly, then, as the bodily heart, if impure, dulls the bodily eye, so the moral heart, if unclean, will dim the moral eye. Jesus always goes to the very root of the trouble, and by healing the root, He cleanses the fruit. That is why His salvation is so great. Just as a skilful doctor would deal with a man's eye through his heart if he had the disease about which I have spoken, so Jesus deals with our sight and our hearing, and our thinking, too, through our hearts.

Believe me, a great deal of the doubt that clouds people's minds is just a mist that has risen up from their impure hearts. When our will is set to do what is right, our mind will be clear as to our path. Even a stupid boy will be brightened when he gets a new heart. When Jesus comes into the life, He straightens things up all round. He smartens the brain when He cleanses the heart. His salvation is an all-round salvation, and if you will let Him into your lives, He will guard the head from blunders, as well as the heart from sin. The cleverest men in the world are Christian men—that is, Christ's men, men who are anxious above everything else to do Christ's will. The nations

that are soundest in head and cleanest in heart, and richest in brave and noble deeds are the nations that are trying to please Jesus Christ.

Have you this salvation? If not, don't wait another moment. You can have it just now, this very instant, and just for the asking. With it as a helmet, you can go out among all the poisonous words and thoughts that the enemy may try to lodge in your brain. It will turn them all aside. With it you need not worry about anything. Why should you? Clothed from head to foot in heavenly armour, and on the winning side, you need be anxious for nothing—you need fear nothing.

“Not all the powers of hell can fright
A soul that walks with Christ in light.
He walks, and cannot fall:
Clearly he sees, and wins his way,
Shining unto the perfect day,
And more than conquers all.”

XIII

The Sword

XIII

The Sword

"And take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

EPHESIANS vi. 17

Now we come to the one and only weapon which the Christian soldier needs. Of course, it is a very fine thing to be clothed from head to foot in armour that nothing can pierce, and to be able to move about amid all kinds of danger, bearing a charmed life. Still, at the same time, a fellow likes to be able to hit back occasionally, and not let the other side have all the fun. It makes a fight much more interesting when you can give as well as take, when you can thrust as well as parry. So Paul tells us to "take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

This is for the purpose of attack, though, of course, a sword is just as reliable as a means of defence. A skilful swordsman can so use his weapon as to weave about him a gleaming

136 The Beauty of Strength

wall of steel, through which his foe finds it impossible to pass. Now, that which serves the purpose of a sword in the hand of the Christian is the Word of God, and like a sword it answers for the double purpose of defence and attack. If you make a companion of God's word, it will lessen your temptations to sin. You know we make a great many temptations for ourselves, just through the company we keep. Books, as well as people, carry an atmosphere about with them. If you breathe the air that clings about them, you grow weak and open to attack. There are some atmospheres so impure that to live in them even for a short time is to run a very great risk. Men who work in mines, and in factories where the air is foul, become very pale and feeble, and then they easily fall victims to disease. There is nothing like plenty of fresh air for keeping the body in health. That is one reason why God has given you a nose, that you might get swift warning of a tainted atmosphere, and keep off. I have a friend in Australia who cannot tell the difference between the smell of a violet and that of an onion. One night in a public meeting that he was addressing, the acetylene gas

escaped to such an extent that the people were leaving the hall. He smelt nothing but presently felt himself somehow to be dividing into two different persons, one talking and the other standing by, and if someone had not come to the rescue serious results might have followed. It is a fine thing to have a keen scent. It is a protection against danger. It is an important thing to take care of your nose, and then it will take care of you. Like a sentry on outpost duty, it will give you danger signals of trouble ahead. Now, I have seen boys, and even girls, hanging about evil-smelling drains, and munching apples over an open sewer, as though there were no other place in the whole world in which to play. If ever you see a boy doing that kind of thing, hunt him off, because that is the hiding place of typhoid fever, diphtheria, and all the black brotherhood of disease and death.

Now, what a bad drain is to the bodily health, a bad book is to the health of the soul. A bad book is the word of Satan, and breathes out an air of fatal sickness wherever it goes. But God's Word is like a fresh breeze from the sea, or the sweet breath of the meadow-land when it is strewn with new-mown hay, or the

138 The Beauty of Strength

bracing air of the mountains laden with the scent of fragrant pines. Keep in the fresh air of God's Word, and you will be safe from a thousand dangers that befall the people who breathe the poisoned air of bad and worthless books. The more you read the Bible, the more you'll get to love it, and the more you love it, the more you'll grow like it, for we always become like the thing we love. This very love for what is pure and good will put a wall of defence around you. It will be like a flaming sword turning every way, and guarding your tree of life.

But not only will the word of God be a means of defence to you, it will be also a weapon of attack. Satan has very little chance with the man who is skilful in the use of God's Word. If you will only store your memories with the Scriptures, then whenever an impure thought of the enemy tries to break through the lines of your defence, the pure Word of God will leap out like a flashing blade of steel and put it to flight. Get as much of the Bible as you can off by heart, and every text will be like a two-edged sword. There is nothing that makes the Devil fall back so quickly and with such con-

fusion as the Word of God. This was the only weapon that Jesus used in his fierce conflict with the enemy, and it was quite sufficient. If you read the story of the Temptation in the wilderness you will see that Jesus met every word of Satan with the Word of God. He just flashed out texts of Scripture from the scabbard of his memory till, wounded and defeated, the devil limped off and owned Him conqueror. Don't try to meet temptation with any sword of your own making. This is the reason why we are so often defeated. We try some word of our own, some wooden sword of human manufacture, which only breaks in our hand and puts us at the mercy of our foe. Never try your words on the devil. There is nothing he delights in more, than to get us to talk things over with him, for we are no match for him in argument. He turns our words aside as though they were but cardboard blades; but the sword of the Spirit he cannot withstand. Get a firm grip, then, of this sword, and, clothed from head to foot in heavenly armour, you will be able to "stand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

XIV

Praying

XIV

Praying

"Praying always with all prayer."

EPHESIANS vi. 18

We have been taking the armour piece by piece, and I have tried to show you what each piece means. Let us suppose now that you have done what Paul advises, that you have put it all on, so that you are now clothed from head to foot in armour easy to carry and hard to pierce. Is that all you need, and can you go out now and not only stand your own ground, but drive the enemy from his? Paul does not think so, and from what he goes on to say, it is very clear that we are not sent out to independent fighting. God does not intend that we shall go out "on our own," as though He had done everything He was going to do for us, and that now we must look after ourselves, fighting our battles and winning our victories or sustaining our defeats uncared for and alone. Nothing of the kind. All through the struggle—and it

144 The Beauty of Strength

will be life-long—we are to be in constant communication with headquarters, corresponding with our Captain, asking for and receiving instructions and support. This is what Paul means when he says: “praying always with all prayer.” Prayer is asking for what we need, and whatever else you may be doubtful about, of this you may be certain, that you can always get God to listen to you at a moment’s notice. He is always at call. You need only whisper, and He will hear. Indeed, there will be times when you cannot even whisper but the starting tear will become a prayer and bring Him to your side. Some of you, perhaps, have the telephone laid on to your house. Suppose you want to speak to your father at his office. Of course, you ring up. But, then, he might be engaged with someone else, and too busy to speak to you. Or he might have gone out for an hour. Or, as sometimes happens, something may have gone wrong with the telephone wire, so that you cannot get your message through. Now, nothing like this can ever happen with your prayers. Prayer is the most wonderful telephone in the world. It has been in use for thousands of years, and though millions of

people have used it, it has never got out of repair. You have never to ask, "Are you there?" when you go to the prayer telephone. God is always there. He is never so busy that He cannot listen to you and answer your prayer. You have never to ring up the Exchange and ask to be "put on" to God. You are always on, and nobody—not even an archangel—can "ring you off." O the wonder of it all! that men and women and little children, everywhere and always, can speak into the very ear of God, telling Him all they need, and knowing that for Christ's sake He will answer their prayer. This is one of the sweetest and most beautiful truths in the whole world, and that we cannot understand how it works must not keep us from using it. How many among the tens of thousands who use the telephone understand how their voices are carried for hundreds of miles along a wire? Yet no one allows his ignorance of how it works to keep him from using the instrument when required. So never you mind how God answers prayer. The principal thing to know and remember is that He does answer it, and all you have to do is just to tell Him what you need and wait His time.

146 The Beauty of Strength

Of course, I don't mean to say that God will give you everything you ask for. He loves you too well to do that, and His love is shown just as much in the things He denies you as in those He gives. But you just go on asking as usual, and leave Him to sort out your prayers. You won't know what is best for you sometimes, but He will, and you may safely trust Him to do the very best He can for you; and remember there are never any mistakes made at Headquarters. Even if God does not give you the thing you asked for and which you thought would be good, He will give you something else which He knows will be a great deal better. Just pray about everything, however small. Bring God into every part of your life, home, and school, lessons and play, and He will bless and brighten them all.

Paul says, "Praying with all prayer." Now, by "all prayer" he means every kind of prayer. Of course, you know that you ought to have stated and regular times for prayer, just as you have for your meals. Daniel prayed "three times a day"—morning, noon, and night. They were his stated times with which he allowed nothing to interfere, even when he was Prime

Minister of one of the greatest empires in the world. But Daniel often prayed between times as well. You know that breakfast, dinner, and supper do not prevent you from having some refreshment between meals. You can always manage a banana or an apple at recess time in the morning, and a good slice of bread and jam at four in the afternoon, to say nothing of what you have before breakfast and what you take before going to bed. I might change the text to make it read, "Feeding always with all kinds of food," and it would be true of certain boys I know. Every chance of something to eat that offers they take. Now, that's how to pray. Stated times, between times, any time, every time. Whenever you feel your heart getting hungry for God; whenever you feel faint in spirit and want refreshing; whenever you are sad and want cheering up, just "ask and receive that your joy may be full."

Now, prayer is sometimes called an "exercise." It is a gymnastic for the soul. You know what physical drill is, and how it strengthens and toughens the muscles, making them hardy and able to endure. Well, prayer is spiritual drill, and does for the soul what the

148 The Beauty of Strength

other drill does for the body. It is not always an easy thing to pray. Indeed, sometimes it is very difficult, and, strange to say, when we need to pray most we often want to pray least. You will have to call up all your power of will sometimes to keep your soul engaged and your mind fixed on the business. Prayer with the mind wandering all over the place and thinking of something else all the time is a useless thing. Remember that what you get out of your prayers in the way of comfort and grace to help in time of need will depend on what you put into them in the way of earnestness. You see, if God gave you an answer to a prayer when you were not in earnest and did not care whether you got it or not, you would not value it when it came, and it would do you no good. Unless you really feel the need of the thing you ask for, you won't get it. Suppose that some afternoon, after school, you ask your mother for something to eat, and because she happens to be busy and unable to attend to you at the moment, you drop your books and stroll off for a game of football. Do you think your mother will come chasing you round with a slice? Not much! But why? Because she knows very

well that if you are really hungry you will stand by and bother her till you get it, and if you are not hungry enough to stay till she gives it to you, you can very well wait till supper. Now, real prayer is the cry of a hungry soul for food, asking and waiting to be served. When we are really hungry and thirsty for the thing we ask in prayer, the answer will not be far away nor long in coming. Learn how to pray. Get into practice at once. It is like everything else; you can get "out of form" through neglect; but if you will only practice, you will become expert. It is only through prayer that you can become "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." It is only through prayer that you can either win or wear the armour, and thus be able to "withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

XV

Watching

XV

Watching

"Watching thereunto with all perseverance."

EPHESIANS vi. 18

Last time we were speaking about prayer and all the wonderful things that God will do for us if we will but ask Him. There are some things, however, that God will not do for us, but which we must do for ourselves, and one of these is "watching." Of course, you know how important it is in battle that someone should be always on the lookout. An army always has its sentries posted. All night long, as well as all day, they have to pace to and fro with wakeful, watchful eyes, and with ears keen to catch the softest tread, challenging every footfall and demanding the password at every approach, thus guarding the camp from surprise.

Now, as I have reminded you frequently during these talks, we are at war, and it is be-

154 The Beauty of Strength

cause our enemy is so skilful in planning surprises that we must be always on the alert. We must be like soldiers on sentry—never taking it easy. Of course, in ordinary sentry work, the soldier is not always on duty; he is relieved by another taking his place, and then he can go back to his tent and sleep. But there is no relief from duty in our battle with Satan. Ours is a life-long sentry. We must always be on guard—always watching against attack. This is the meaning of “Perseverance” and it is the only time this word occurs in the Scriptures. It means unwearying constancy. Did you ever see a sentry-box? If so, you will have noticed that when the sentry is in, he touches the walls on all sides. It just about fits him. There are no carpets or rugs about, no sofas or easy chairs; there is no room for them; indeed, unless the sentry stands up straight there is not room for him! If he tried to lie down he could not get himself all in. Now, all this want of comfort in the arrangement of a sentry-box is intentional. The sentry must not take it easy; he must not be made too comfortable, lest he fall asleep, and the enemy get within the lines. The people to whom Paul was

writing understood all about this, for the Roman guards or sentries were familiar to people everywhere throughout the known world. They were magnificent fellows, splendidly trained, and loving duty more than life. I once saw a wonderful piece of statuary called the "Flight from Pompeii." The statue itself is a lovely piece of work and shows a man with his wife and little baby hurrying from the doomed city during an eruption of Vesuvius. But when you have looked at that, you will find all round the pedestal, sculptures of different scenes during that awful time, and one of these represents a sturdy Roman guard standing at the city gate, unmoved and unmovable, amid the sulphurous death. Although crowds of people are hurrying past him, seeking to save themselves and their belongings, he stands firm as a rock, choosing rather to die at his post than purchase his life at the cost of his honor and his oath.

It was men of this sort that Paul was meeting and talking to every day, and many a story of eventful outpost duty would they tell him during the long hours in which they were keeping guard. Even if Paul had not thought much

156 The Beauty of Strength

about the importance of wakeful watching before, these stories of the camp would make him think that if against foes that could be seen and handled, it was thus necessary to be always on guard, how much greater was the need when the enemy could be neither heard nor seen.

Now, I think you will find that most of the sins we commit arise from our being off guard. It is not that we sit down and think it over first and then deliberately do what is wrong; we rather get surprised into it through unwatchfulness. The Greek word for "watch" which Paul uses has three meanings. First of all it means to "wake up from sleep." You know how hard this is sometimes, especially on dark wintry mornings when the wind is howling round the house and the rain is beating against the window of your room. How many times have you to be called on a morning like that? How often do you answer, "Y-e-s," turning over in your sleep without waking up at all? Now, Paul does not tell us to turn over in our sleep, but to wake right up, to throw off sleep, to open our eyes. This is what the word "watch" means—to cast off sleep and have done with it. But even that is not enough.

Paul's word means not only "wake up!" but "get up!" You know if you don't get up at once when you wake, the bed feels so "comfy" that it holds you down, and the longer you stay, the longer you want to. If you were to walk through a certain college that I know you would not find a single bedroom door without one or two cracked panels. They have been whanged and banged of a morning so often, to rouse up sleepy boys, that they have all been split. Of course, at the beginning of the year, after the long vacation, the bell would wake everybody, but it is just wonderful what you can get used to in the way of noise, and still sleep on. And so it always came to pass that in about a fortnight nobody heard the bell at all, or if they did, it was so mixed up in their dreams that it did not disturb them. Then for the rest of the term the master on duty, with a towel wrapped round his fist would go from room to room, pounding the panels of the doors till he got a satisfactory answer; and even then some fellows would come tumbling down to prayers, buttoning up their vests or putting on their collars as they came, and taking three steps of the stairs at a time.

158 The Beauty of Strength

The great thing is to get up at once when you wake. It never gets easier. The more you think about it, especially if you have to take a cold shower, the harder it is to get out. I would advise you, when you ought to get up, and can't make up your mind for the spring, just to think of sleep as a great octopus waiting to throw his long tentacles round you, that he may draw you down, down, down, and drown you in the sea of forgetfulness. This will shake you up and wake you up, and make you jump for bare life; then, once you are out of bed, the spell will be broken, so that you will not want to go back to bed even if you have the chance. But even yet we have not got all the meaning out of Paul's word "watch." It means not only "wake up," and "get up," but "look around!" "Be on guard!" Have all your wits about you!" The wisdom of all this is seen from the fact that your enemy is so cunning. Paul speaks in this very chapter about the "wiles of the devil." This means "tricks." Now, you know that in playing a game sometimes there are certain tricks that you have to watch against, or else the other side may gain an unfair advantage. But in a game you can ap-

peal to the umpire, and insist on fair play, and if you don't get it, you can withdraw from the game and decline to play. But in this struggle with Satan and his forces you have no choice. Even though he cheats every time and takes all sorts of mean advantages, you must fight, and against all he knows. If long practice in unfairness and deceit have anything to do with knowing how to do it, then by this time the devil must be an expert sneak. Anyhow, he is a tricky foe, and takes us unawares if he can, so that we need to be always on the alert, watchful, wakeful, prepared, lest coming suddenly he sweep us off our feet and take us captive at his will.

Now, it is not that watching of itself will save us, but that by watching we shall get warning of the danger and know exactly when and what to ask for in our prayers. You see, we are not told to watch unto fighting, but unto "prayer." You know that the first business of a sentry when he observes the enemy stealing up to his lines is not to fight the foe himself, but to alarm and fall back upon the "picket," that is, a body of the troops who are to be always ready in case of surprise. He does not,

160 The Beauty of Strength

unless absolutely forced to it, engage the enemy himself. When the picket is alarmed then the "support" is roused. This is a body of the soldiers who may go to sleep, but are all dressed and ready for action at a moment's notice when roused. By this time the "reserves" have got shaken up, and instead of surprising a sleeping camp, the enemy discover that they have to deal with a wide-awake army, eager for the fray. Now, just as the sentry does not engage the enemy himself, but gives the alarm which is really a prayer for help, so with us, when standing guard we feel the danger near, it is not our business to fight single-handed with the foe, but to call upon the forces which are always at our back and ready to come at our call. This is "watching unto prayer."

Wake up! That is your business. When you are thoroughly roused, watchful, and waiting to know and do your duty, you will see it plain and clear. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and Christ shall give you light." Waking up and going round in the dark is bad business. When the dog barks in the middle of the night, and you thing someone is prowling round the house, you grope about to find the electric switch, or

the matches if you happen to live in the country. But anyone who has done this will know what a wonderful time you can have. You seem to be in a furniture shop. There are so many things to come against and to tumble over. You never seem to be through with them. You never thought there were so many things in the room before. Then when you are quite sure you are in front of the door, you walk straight into the fireplace, or fetch up with your big toe against a chair, while your nose feels for the mantelpiece in such unseemly haste that you see a shower of dancing stars. All this is most exhausting, and it all comes of waking up and getting up in the dark. Now, nothing like this can happen to you if you will obey Paul's word of command. Just you try; rouse yourselves up, and Christ will give you such light and wisdom that you will never be in doubt about the next step and never be surprised into sin. "Watch, therefore, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

"Principalities and powers
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours—
Watch and pray.

162 The Beauty of Strength

“Gird thy heavenly armour on,
Wear it ever night and day;
Ambushed lies the evil one—
Watch and pray.”

14

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